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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

OES/OA FOR R.WILBUR

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TAGS: NL SENV ENV EPA

SUBJECT: DUTCH "WHITE WATER TO BLUE WATER" ROUNDTABLE

REF: STATE 269150

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The Dutch Ministry of Transport/Waterways (with the support of Embassy The Hague) held a half-day roundtable event to introduce the White Water to Blue Water Initiative. The Dutch, who are on the steering committee, aimed to recruit new partners from civil society and academia and to solicit input for their preparations for the March 2004 Miami conference. The successful roundtable demonstrated GONL commitment to the partnership as well as interest among Dutch NGOs. However, the government has not yet decided what it will bring to the conference in terms of funding. End Sumary.

¶2. (U) The Netherlands Ministry of Transport/Waterways and Embassy The Hague co-hosted a half-day roundtable meeting on White Water to Blue Water (WW2BW) in the Hague on October 129. The meeting was held at the National Institute for Coastal and Marine Management (RIKZ). Approximately forty guests attended the meeting, which was moderated by Frans Tjallingii, International Affairs Coordinator of the Dutch Ministry of Transport/Waterways. The Netherlands is a member of the WW2BW Steering Committee.

¶3. (U) Keynote speaker Cecilia Anthony, Acting Minister Plenipotentiary of the Netherlands Antilles in the Hague, gave a compelling summary of the environmental challenges faced by Caribbean islands. Department of State OES/Ocean Affairs Officer Richard Wilbur provided an overview of the WW2BW initiative and reported on the planning process underway for the March 2004 Miami conference. He highlighted the importance of broad Caribbean participation and the role training courses will play in the conference. Mr. Chris Thompkins of the UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) provided a briefing on the UK perspective and noted that the Spring 2003 UK roundtable had been useful in coordinating efforts of UK stakeholders. He said the UK places a high degree of importance on the WW2BW partnership and plans to focus on fisheries partnerships, sustainable tourism, and Marine Protected Areas. UNEP's director of the Global Program of Action (GPA) Dr. Veerle Vanderweerd delivered a presentation on the GPA and cautioned that it will be a challenge to achieve a concrete outcome for the WW2BW. (Note: UNEP's GPA office is co-located with a division of the Ministry of Transport/Waterworks in the Hague. End Note.) The MFA was represented by Peter de Koning of the Directorate General of International Cooperation. Embassy The Hague was represented by the Economic and Global Issues Sections.

¶4. (U) The Hague meeting, which was modeled after a similar event that was held in London earlier this year, had three primary goals. First, to expand the pool of stakeholders by informing the Ministries, private sector, environmental agencies, international organizations, and scholars about the WW2BW initiative and the March 21, 2004 Miami conference. The Ministry of Transport is compiling a catalogue of companies and organizations who might be interested in partnering with the initiative. Second, to provide participants background information on watersheds, Caribbean region water pollution, tourism and eco-tourism. A third objective was to brainstorm relevant topics and gather Dutch input for the initiative.

¶5. (U) During the forum the attendees were divided into subgroups and offered the opportunity to propose ideas and ask questions that might enhance the success of the Miami conference. OES/Ocean Affairs Officer Wilbur fielded questions regarding youth and university-level participation, and made the point that conference organizers encourage the involvement of universities and students. Wilbur also explained the design of the WW2BW Steering Committee as well as the organization of the theme-based subcommittee system. Participants raised doubts about the willingness of the private sector to endorse a more robust regulatory architecture, but nevertheless recognized the need the private sector/tourism industry to take concrete steps to become more ecologically viable. The groups underscored the need for the Caribbean region to have common legislation on water pollution in order to minimize the risk of loss of competitiveness among islands competing for tourist dollars. Moreover, it was noted that islands must work together to

promote change and to see results.

16. (SBU) Comment and Lessons Learned. The well-organized event demonstrated the GONL's commitment to the WW2BW process. Earlier this year we saw WW2BW added to the MFA's official list of partnerships, a list which it submits for parliamentary comment. While the Ministry of Transport have dedicated two staff to preparing for the initiative, they have not yet secured money for the conference itself, but hope to do so in the near future. It remains unclear what specifically the Dutch will bring to the Miami conference; they are considering supporting training programs and/or funding delegates who might otherwise be unable to afford the trip. Post will continue to pursue this issue with Dutch counterparts. The roundtable discussion also reflected strong interest on the part of the private sector and academia in participating in WW2BW. Attendees were able to take away useful information regarding the upcoming Miami Conference in March 2004. It remains to be seen whether the Kingdom of the Netherlands will show a united presence at the March conference, or if Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles will mount independent delegations. The participation of State OES/OA Officer Wilbur added significant value to the meeting and helped strengthen relationships between the USG and Dutch ministries involved in water partnerships. Other posts planning similar roundtable meetings may want to broaden the list of invitees to include more NGOs, as well as inviting econ/environment officers from other embassies in the host country capital. End Comment.

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